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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000636

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2013

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SUBJECT: MEETING WITH AHMED OULD DADDAH'S VICE-PRESIDENT
AND POTENTIAL RIVAL

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary. On October 29, AID Rep met with opposition parliamentarian and RFD Vice-President Dr. Hamidou Kane to discuss Mauritania's current political situation. The meeting was at Kane's request. Immediately after the August 6 coup, Kane expressed his ardent support for the junta's "rectification" and had high hopes for further positive political change. Three months later, he is more pessimistic but sees the potential of presidential elections on/about October 2009, followed by new legislative elections, as the light at the end of the tunnel -- provided that military are prohibited from being candidates. Between now and those elections, Kane believes that the HSC will take strong steps in the near future to win over its splintering opposition as alliances re-forge. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Kane's pessimism stems from differing objectives and increased splintering within what he sees as Mauritania's current political players: 1) the High State Council (HSC) junta administration; 2) the FNDD coalition; and 3) the classic opposition parties such as (Rassemblement des Forces Democratiques) RFD, Mouvement de la Democratie Directe (MDD) and Alliance pour la Justice et la Democratie (AJD). While all three players are beginning to experience break-away elements, their respective views have followed standard lines for the past few months:
-- The HSC wants military leadership and no international sanctions;
-- The FNDD wants President Abdallahi's return to power, and international sanctions, but does not want military leadership;
-- The classic opposition wants no military leadership, no return of President Abdallahi and no international sanctions.

¶3. (C) According to Kane, the classic opposition, in particular, is falling victim to internal divides. Their position is weakening as "opportunists" clamor to support HSC for personal economic benefit. For example AJD's spokesperson recently became advisor to junta leader Abdel Aziz, and the party broke its alliance with behemoth RFD. Even within RFD, there are diverging views and support to party president Ould Daddah may be weakening. Kane stated that he continued to support Ould Daddah, but did not deny that he had political aspirations of his own, having just returned from what he referred to as a political campaign trip to Spain to meet with the sizeable Mauritanian community there. Kane sees the FNDD and HSC also beginning to lose their strong footing as the country's economy and social system continue to struggle in the post-coup environment.

Like the RFD, both have fallen victim to individual opportunists seeking personal gain and losing sight of their political values.

¶4. (C) The Parliament,s Transitional Roadmap : In September 2008, National Assembly members held a questionably legal extraordinary session, without the approval for the National Assembly President. During that session, non-boycotting members voted to approve a transitional roadmap they developed that called for elections within 12-14 months of the August coup. The roadmap did not stipulate whether or not military would be allowed to run for President. Although Kane participated in the session, he claimed he did not vote on the roadmap because it lacked clarity on the military candidacy issue. He emphasized that the HSC has not yet made a decision regarding this draft, and it will likely be further discussed during the anticipated yet oft-delayed national consultation days.

¶5. (C) What the HSC will do to win support: Kane anticipates that HSC will take strong measures to "convince" the populace of the military's right to power through: 1) constitutional revision; 2) a diplomatic rejection of Israel; and 3) further restriction of public freedoms. Kane opines that HSC will undertake a massive constitutional revision with the reasoning that the current 1991 constitution is illegitimate as it was developed under an illegitimate government. He thinks that the public will be involved in voting for a constitutional referendum, instead of just a legislative vote. He did not venture to presume what will be contained in the new constitution. On Israel,

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Kane anticipates that the HSC will soon break its diplomatic relations in an effort to further gain Moor support, and simultaneously snub its nose at the United States and other western countries calling for Abdallahi's return to power. Kane anticipates that this will help gain "significant" Moor support for HSC but will have little if any effect on the Afro-Mauritanian population. Finally, Kane predicts that the HSC,s restrictions on personal freedoms, including freedom of association will increase along with arbitrary arrests. Kane supports the idea of constitutional reform and breaking ties with Israel, but he draws the line with increasing human rights violations and post-election military leadership. He recommended that the United States and other western donors support the return to democracy in Mauritania by funding new presidential and legislative elections and helping to ensure that only civilians are allowed to run as candidates. He also cited the Department of State's annual Human Rights Report as being an important tool to raise awareness, both internationally and within Mauritania, on human rights violations. Interestingly, Kane stated that an assassination attempt on Abdel Aziz is a possibility, while a second coup is looking all the more unlikely.

¶6. (C) Comment. The RFD, and the classic opposition as a whole, likes to think of itself as a being centrist, and the most politically realistic of the three political actors -- the "NiNi" option to the failings of both the military and President Abdallahi. For all his to-and-fro positions, Ahmed Ould Daddah has maintained himself as a separate option to the two extremes; however, he has likely weakened his personal political future. Kane's outreach to the Mission reflects a possible transition of power within the RFD leadership. In the rapidly changing Mauritanian political landscape, we can expect periodic splintering on all sides, new alliances and emerging political actors could be formed in the not distant future. A constitutional referendum which would likely be designed to legitimize the military junta is a frightening thought; however, a loose coalition of anti-coup forces exists for now capable of blocking a rubber-stamp charade. The RFD, for one, seems to be looking out for a long and treacherous transition. End comment.

HANKINS